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SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA

Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC211

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90248)

Taken into State care: 1890 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2004

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

RISPAIN CAMP



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RISPAIN CAMP

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- The site occupies a dominant position commanding the rolling fields of the South Machars of Galloway, off A746 1.5km W of Whithorn.
- The monument comprises the remains of Rispain Camp, a small late-Iron Age defended farm or fort, surviving both as well-preserved earthworks and as buried archaeology.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- A small defended farm, or fort, now known to date from the time immediately before and during the Roman occupation of parts of southern Scotland in the early centuries AD. Before excavation it had been thought to be a medieval moated site.
- The fort, as far as we can tell, was created by members of the native Novantae tribe, who lived in what we now call Galloway.
- The fort came into state care in 1890, as part of Pitt-Rivers' first 'schedule'.

Archaeological Overview

- The fort, rectilinear in plan, measures about 70m by 50m within an impressive double rampart and ditch, which was originally c.6m in depth. The entrance causeway breaks the ditch at the north-east.
- Excavations in 1978-9 revealed the remains of a large timber-framed gate, through which a metalled road ran towards a group of three large, circular timber buildings which stood within the enclosure. One of these was fully excavated, and found to be c.13m in diameter, and of ring-groove construction. The excavations, which sampled about 10% of the total area of the enclosure, produced radiocarbon dates for the occupation of the site spanning the later centuries BC into the first two centuries AD.
- The ditches are likely to have the potential to inform an understanding of the development of the late-Iron Age landscape, together with evidence of contemporary agricultural and economic practices.

Social Overview

Not assessed

Spiritual Overview

None known

Aesthetic Overview

- The carefully tended rectangular interior, and the deeply-cut ditch, confront the viewer as plainly artificial elements compared with the surrounding natural landscape of the Machars.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- What did the defences comprise?
- Was the domestic and agriculture function more important than the defensive?
- How was the surrounding land being farmed?
- How does Rispain compare to other contemporary settlements in the area, eg the promontory fort at Barsalloch?

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- The well-preserved remains of a small, late Iron-Age fort of unusual form.
- Likely to have been the home farm of a minor chief of the Novantae, large enough to support an extended family group.
- Although partly excavated in 1978-79, it retains considerable potential to provide information regarding life in a defended farm of this period.

Associated Properties

Barsalloch Fort; Dundonald Castle; Dumbarton Castle (latter two originated as forts of this period).

Keywords Iron Age; Novantae; fort; farm; round house.